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ABSTRACT

For this exploratory study, 20 child care aides, teachers, and directors in 4 different types of child care centers in Santa Clara County, California, were interviewed. The four centers were: (1) a nonprofit center subsidized by the state that served 166 children of AFDC-eligible parents or parents in job training programs; (2) a nonprofit center serving 115 children that was subsidized by a local social service agency; (3) a private, for-profit center that served 163 children and was funded entirely by parent fees; and (4) a private, for-profit center that was part of a nationally franchised chain. Respondents were asked background questions and questions about their education and training, their decision to enter the field and to take their current job, their current working conditions and job satisfaction, and their thoughts about alternative jobs. Findings are presented in sections on pay and benefits, adequacy of staffing, managerial skills and style of directors, opportunities for professional development, and relations with children and parents. Concluding discussion summarizes several inexpensive policies which were thought by the respondents to enhance job satisfaction. (RH)

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CHILD CARE CENTERS AS WORKPLACES

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I. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of a labor market for child care workers is a relatively recent phenomenon, having been created as an outgrowth of the remarkable increase in the labor force participation of women with preschool children. Between 1970 and 1980, over 400,000 new jobs were created in child care--the fourth largest gain of all female-dominated occupations (Census Bureau, 1986). Although precise figures are not available, it has been estimated that the number of child care workers ranges between 727,000 (O'Connell & Bloom, 1987) and 1,393,000 (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986).[1] More jobs are expected to be created in this occupation as the demand for child care continues to exceed the supply.

In addition to filling new jobs, child care workers are needed to replace the high proportion of workers who leave the field each year. For 1983-84, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (1986) estimated the turnover rate for child care workers (excluding private household) at 35.9 percent. A 1988 study of child care workers in 227 centers in five cities (Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Phoenix and Seattle) found the turnover rate to be 41 percent (Child Care Employee Project, 1989), while a 1988 survey of teachers of preschool children in Santa Clara County, California, the site of our study, found the turnover rate to be 43 percent (Mercury News, 1989).[2]

Part of the explanation for the rather astonishing turnover rates among child care workers is their exceedingly low earnings, especially relative to their rather high average level of

education.[3] The occupation of child care worker is the lowest paid among the female occupations (Viadero, 1987).[4]

Increasing demand for care combined with low wages and high staff turnover have led observers to talk about a staffing crisis in child care and early childhood education (Granger, 1989). The concern is about both availability of care and about its quality. High turnover rates are particularly detrimental to quality because continuity of care is of major importance in the psychological adjustment of young children (Zigler & Kagan, 1982) and because frequent change in caregivers may cause harm (Clarke-Stewart, 1977). Also, high turnover increases the level of stress in the work environment, and negatively affects the job performance and quality of care provided by remaining staff (Whitebook et al. 1982; Mattingly, 1986; Child Care Employee Project, 1989).

Because child care is so labor intensive[5] any attempt to increase the supply of child care must come to grips with recruitment, retention and job satisfaction of the people employed as child care workers. There has been very little work that looks at child care workers as employees and at child care centers as places to work.

This paper is based on twenty intensive interviews with child care aides, teachers and directors in four different types of large child care centers in Santa Clara County, California. Five conditions of work emerged during our interviews as being of primary salience to child care workers' job satisfaction: pay and benefits, adequacy of staffing, managerial skills and style of the director, opportunity for professional development, and

relations with children and parents. Our examination of the work environment at these centers leads us to an appreciation of the difficulty of the job that child care workers perform and of the stress that the job engenders. We also conclude that there are numerous ways in which child care centers could become more satisfactory workplaces.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Our study of centers in Santa Clara County, California, a county that is both urban (San Jose) and suburban, is exploratory and meant to generate rather than test hypotheses. We chose to look only at large centers but to vary the source of the center's funding, hypothesizing, correctly, that we would thus obtain variation in race, ethnicity, and social class of both clientele and staff.[6]

The four centers in our study were as follows: (1) a non-profit center, subsidized by the state, serving 166 children whose parents are eligible for AFDC or who participate in state or federal job training programs (referred to here as "Statefare"); (2) a non-profit center, serving 115 children, subsidized by a local social service agency ("Communitycare"); (3) a private, for-profit, center, serving 163 children and funded fully by parent fees ("Privateplace"); and (4) a private, for profit, center (with 186 children) that is part of a nationally franchised chain of centers ("Childchain").

The particular centers at which we interviewed were selected after we determined the four types of centers that we wished to study. We obtained the names of three of the centers from suggestions of friends and associates familiar with child care in

the county. We obtained the name of the chain from the phone book. In each case, when we called the center and explained the purpose of the study, the director agreed to cooperate, several enthusiastically.

We asked directors to select two teachers and two aides that we could interview. The directors chose subjects who were going to be on a break at the time of the interviewing, or whose children were resting during nap time, or who for some other reason were able to leave the classroom without violating the mandated adult-child ratios for a licensed center. It is, of course, possible that the director used other criteria to guide her selection, but the workers interviewed at each center were quite heterogeneous and honest in their comments; we never had the impression that they were telling us what the director wanted us to hear.

Interviews with workers in the four centers were held in February and March of 1988. At Statefare, we interviewed two aides, two teachers and the director; at Communitycare, one aide (the only male in the sample), three teachers and the director; at Privateplace, two aides, two teachers and the director; and at Childchain, one aide, three teachers and the director.[7] One aide and one teacher worked part-time, the rest were full-time.

After separate permission for the interviews was granted by each subject, we questioned her or him using an informal open-ended interview format. All respondents were guaranteed complete anonymity. With permission, most interviews were tape recorded. The interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes to complete. All but one were conducted at the center in an empty room or at an

outside play area. One interview was conducted in a teacher's home.[8]

Respondents were asked five types of questions:

(1) background questions about themselves and their family--their age, previous job experience, professional affiliations, race, marital status, spouse's occupation and salary, and the number and age of their children (if any);

(2) questions about their education and training, and particularly about the type of early childhood education (ECE) courses taken;

(3) questions regarding their decision to enter the field of child care and their decision to take their current job;

(4) questions regarding their current working conditions and degree of job satisfaction, including their job description, salary and benefits, the number of hours of employment, the distance from home to work, the adult-child ratio, the age and number of children served, the opportunity for breaks and sick leave, their sense of budgetary constraints, frequency of staff meetings, staff relations, relations with parents, relations with children, their perceived input into decisionmaking, their perceived sense that their job is appreciated, and their perceived match between personal and center's child care philosophy; and

(5) questions regarding their thoughts about alternative jobs and occupations, including perceived desirability of child care as an occupation, frequency of thoughts of job termination, perceived ability to find another job or occupation, and perceived family support for their current job and occupation.

To analyze the data gathered from the 20 interviews, we constructed meta-matrices to summarize all relevant material. As described by Miles and Huberman (1984), meta-matrices are useful in assembling descriptive data into a standard format since they permit information to be partitioned as well as clustered. The names of the workers appear across the top, and the topics of interest about the workers below the names. Using this technique allows contrasts and comparisons on variables to become clearer.

The matrix included the 32 topics of interest detailed in the previous paragraph.[9] Thus, we had a 20 x 32 matrix that could be rearranged in any order, allowing us to compare data on each topic for all workers as well as to do within-site and across-site analyses.

III. FINDINGS

Not all of the data collected are analyzed in this paper. We concentrate here on issues of work environment and job satisfaction.

Table I provides information on respondents' age, length of employment, race, marital status, number and age of children, spouses' income (if applicable), education, and courses in early childhood education (ECE). Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 50; the mean age of teachers was 30.6, the mean age of aides was 22. Teachers had been in their jobs an average of 3.5 years (for several, part of that time was spent as aides) and aides had on average slightly less than a year and a half on their jobs.

As noted in the introduction, five conditions of work emerged during our interviews as being of primary salience to child care workers' job satisfaction. We discuss each of these in turn.

A. PAY AND BENEFITS

As indicated in Table I, earnings ranged from $4.15 per hour at Statefare for a 22-year old aide who had been on the job for 3 years and still had no ECE units, to $10 an hour at Communitycare for a 33-year old teacher with a B.A. who had been on the job for 6 years. The highest paid director ($2560 per month) was 35 with an M.A. in child development employed at Communitycare. At Childchain the director earned $1400 per month. (She was 26, had 27 ECE units and had been on the job for 9 months. At Statefare the director, who was 35, had 27 ECE units and 9 years of experience on the job, although only a few months of those years had been as director. She earned $1500 per month. We were unable to ascertain the salary of the director at Privateplace.

As illustrated by these figures, not only are payscales low, but the earnings hierarchy is exceedingly flat, with very small rewards for training and experience. All of the interviewees mentioned low pay and poor prospects for pay increases as negative aspects of their job. They used a variety of strategies to survive. Some had husbands who earned a reasonable income, some kept their expenses very low, and still others sought additional work.

At Statefare, the lowest paid center, many workers did not own a car and walked, took the bus, or shared a ride to work. Others saved money by living with relatives who charged them very low rent. The director at Statefare, a single mother of three children, explained some of the consequences of her low pay:

We make it from paycheck to paycheck. My kids do without. They've gone without a lot. They're always going without... I try to get them what they need but there is (sic) some things I

just can't give that's really important to them but not to me. Like my son is in track and needs track shoes and I don't have fifty dollars for track shoes, so that's really important for him.

An aide at Statefare, who is happy with her job, but in need of additional income (she earns $4.25 an hour) was planning to take an additional part-time job explained:

What I'm thinking about right now is finding me (sic) another job. I'm talking more like maybe getting a job at a store or something part time...I feel like I want the money even though it (working two jobs) is going to tire me out...I want to buy myself a car.

To some extent the low pay was eased by the availability of fringe benefits. Workers who had young children generally were able to enroll their children at the center at reduced tuition levels. One teacher, age 33, who worked at Privateplace, earning $5.75 an hour with a B.A. degree in Elementary Education said that one of the main reasons she stays on at the center is that she receives a 50 percent reduction of tuition and no registration fee for her child who attends there.

The best benefit package was at Communityplace and the workers there were well-aware of how much better their benefits were as compared to their counterparts at other centers.[10] The lack of availability of health insurance and dental insurance at other centers was particularly important for some workers. One teacher at Privateplace told us that although medical insurance was not a concern for her because her husband had access to coverage through his job, it was a major concern for others:

That's the reason why some teachers are leaving. When they see a center where they can get insurance, that's the main cause of leaving here.

Other benefits that were important to workers were paid vacations, paid sick days, and the opportunity to obtain ECE units at reduced cost. Workers who had these benefits were generally more satisfied with their jobs than workers who didn't.

B. ADEQUACY OF STAFFING

Respondents were almost as concerned with inadequate staffing at their centers as they were with low pay and absence of benefits. They found that inadequate staffing contributed to stress and difficulty in providing what they regarded as adequate care for their students. There are four aspects of staffing that we will discuss in this section: the staffing context at a large child care center, the difficulty of hiring staff, the issue of hiring substitutes, and the absence of paid time for preparation.

1. The Staffing Context

In the four centers we visited, directors, teachers and aides were in a perpetual game of musical chairs as they tried to cover classes and meet the adult/child ratios mandated by the state.[11] Almost everyday some adjustments in classroom staffing had to be made. Some of the staff members--usually the lead teachers--knew that when they came to work in the morning they would go to a particular classroom with a certain group of children, but many other staff members would not be assigned a classroom until they arrived for work. Or they would be asked to "float" between classrooms. If one classroom had several children absent due to illness, fewer adults were needed in that room to maintain the required adult to child ratio. A teaching

assistant from that room might be asked to move to another where the number of children was "up".

Staffing patterns changed not only from day to day, but also from hour to hour. Unlike most public schools, most centers do not have a uniform time of day for children to arrive and depart. Rather, depending on their schedules, parents can bring children in and take them out throughout the day. Moreover, while some children may attend the center five days a week, others come in every other day; while some children are at the center for eight hours a day, other children attend for only a few hours at a time.[12]

Between assuring that mandated ratios were maintained (ratios are different for different age children), accommodating to high levels of absenteeism among staff and adjusting to continuous transitions, staff members did a tremendous amount of moving back and forth. The director of Childchain said that she has had a complete staff for only one day during her four months tenure as director. Her need to juggle personnel was evident:

> I had one person out today in my toddler room, and then I still haven't filled that two year old opening or my other infant opening. So I'm essentially three people down today. And it's just doing a little bit of juggling here and there. If I hadn't hired somebody earlier this week, I'd be four people down. Then I'd be crazy. I'd call the other centers. I'd go in the classroom. I'd let the phone ring off the hook.

A similar situation prevailed at Statefare. The director there illustrated the extent to which center personnel move from task to task:

> ...if the ratio is down in one area, we'll move a person from one area to another, depending on the ratios. Or during a naptime we'll ask a person to take a long break... In fact, I cooked breakfast for the children yesterday because the cook was out.

2. Difficulty recruiting workers

The difficulty that all of the directors experienced in recruiting staff was a key contributor to inadequate staffing at the centers. At the time of our interviews, all of the directors reported problems in recruiting staff. Although Communitycare had the most stable staff of the four centers, they were experiencing difficulty replacing the assistant director who had recently left. Privateplace was in an awkward position because they had recently lost a half dozen employees who left with the former director. Statefare and Childchain reported chronic shortages.

Directors said that often they simply did not have a response to their advertisements. Low wages was one reason they gave for the lack of response. The director of Childchain talked about being unable to compete in the local labor market:

> (Before) we couldn't offer a competitive wage with the rest of the valley. And just recently we've been able to raise the wages for all the staff members, so we can at least get people calling. (Before) ...you'd have to, you know, practically get people off the street and have them go to classes and offer them free child care.

The small salary increase at Childchain, however, did not solve their recruitment problems. One of the teachers there reported:

> ...there's just not a response right now. I know we had an ad in the paper for a week and a half, and only a couple of people called.

Even when directors did receive a number of responses to their advertisements, they found it difficult to select a potentially good teacher from the applicant pool. Rarely could they find someone with all of the characteristics they sought:

energy, enthusiasm, patience, understanding, stability, experience with young children, common sense, knowledge of child development and a sense of professionalism about child care.

The relatively new director at Childchain indicated to us that she thought her predecessors had compromised quality in some of their hiring decisions and feared she might have to do the same:

> Sometimes...I wonder why--some of their personalities--you just wonder why the other person ever let them in the door (laughter)...And you've really got no reason to let them go, but golly (laughter)...I think they were always like that, and that someone (a director) was just desperate. So I don't want to ever get that desperate. But sometimes I think you do. You just settle for less when you have no alternative.

Part of the reason for the difficulty in recruiting is that working with very young children is exceedingly demanding. The director at Childchain talked of particular problems finding staff for the two-year olds:

> ...I think the two-year old room has got to be the most difficult...Not only are they so busy and never stop, but there's a lot of them and they aren't (toilet) trained...And you're not going to find a young girl who'll come in and change diapers and last more than three days...I mean, you almost need to find a mom. Someone who's accustomed to it. And even then, it's difficult.

3. Substitutes

Another aspect of inadequate staffing is centers' difficulty in hiring substitutes to fill in when a teacher or aide is ill. Illness among both children and adults at centers is common; yet because there are no substitutes, teachers and aides told us they feel guilty about staying at home when they are ill. Several respondents told us their job satisfaction would be increased if centers employed substitutes.

One teacher at Communityplace indicated that the availability of substitute teachers is central to child care workers job satisfaction:

I (need to) know (that) if I'm sick that they are going to get by. You know, (that) I don't have to drag myself in when I feel real sick because no one is going to be there.

A teacher at Communitycare, who had already given notice of quitting said:

The largest complaint that people have is not having enough subs so when a teacher gets sick they (sic) feel guilty for staying home...

There are two methods of providing for substitutes at centers, and, from the directors' point of view, each has its drawbacks. One method is to acquire a list of names of people who are willing to be on-call even though they are not guaranteed work or pay for any certain number of hours or at any particular center. Directors like this method because centers pay substitutes only when they work. However, the drawback of this method, used by Statefare, Privateplace and Childchain is that often these on-call substitutes are not available when the centers need them.

The second option is to hire permanent substitutes who are on the payroll regardless of need and who are therefore always available. Communitycare has used this option, but the director acknowledges that it is expensive and may soon be unfeasible.

The director at Childchain recently tried to hire permanent substitutes, but has had difficulty:

Permanent sub--we'll give them 40 hours a week if that's what they want. Anything. We've tried everything...But a lot of time I get people with kids who can only work until 3:00, or (let me think) they don't feel they should have to go and get their transcripts to bring it (sic) into the center so that we can verify their education. It's been a nightmare, it really has, as

far as getting those subs.

Part of the problem in attracting substitutes is that the job is harder than the usual teacher's job. But the rate of pay is not commensurately higher. The director of Privateplace said:

> The change for the children is harder, so the substitute has to have a real secure, OK feeling when going into the classroom. If she's nervous, the kids will pick up on it and have a free-for-all.

The net result of the difficulty of hiring staff and the lack of substitutes is a chronic short-handedness at the centers. This chronic short-handedness translates into stress for teachers who find they have too many children to care for. The comments of a teacher at Childchain are instructive:

> I can handle 14 by myself, because a lot of my children leave at 4 o'clock. But if I get over 14...I say...'get somebody in here, because I can't handle it'. I go berserk, because it's really hard...I don't think it's fair to me and to all the other teachers in the center...If we need somebody, we should be able to have them (sic). Because if the State came in, I mean we're dust.

Inadequate staffing also affects the teachers because they see the ill effects on the children and on the children's relationship with the overburdened adults. One teacher explained:

> ...it's getting to me, you know. A couple of times, it's like, oh, I don't want to go to work...It's not fun when you have to watch 20 kids. And it's hard to take care of them. Because they know that you're the only one. And my kids have been affected by it. I can see a change in their behavior towards me.

4. Preparation Time

Inadequate staffing also meant that teachers did not have paid time for preparation. Not only were their hourly earnings

low, but they put in several hours per week during which they were not paid at all because there was little time during the day when preparation could be accomplished.

One teacher at Childchain complained:

> There's never enough time. I mean, there's boards we have to get done, because they're really into board work here. We really have to have our boards nice looking...Everything has to be labeled that you put on your boards, plus the name tags of the children that have to go up next to the art work or whatever it is you're putting up. So I take these home, I do them on my lunch hour, or I come in early and I do it then. Or I stay a little bit later and I do it then because, I mean, I don't have enough time during the nine hours that I'm here to get whatever I have to get done.

The absence of preparation time was particularly irksome to some teachers because they felt it symbolized the lack of professional regard by their employers. Instead of being treated like teachers, who require preparation time, they were being treated like babysitters, who don't. One teacher at Communitycare felt that staff who were not paid for preparation time were being exploited:

> I think all child care workers need some prep time, which in child care you rarely get...the field is supported by a lot of people's backbone. You know, what they do on their own time.

C. MANAGERIAL SKILLS AND STYLE OF THE DIRECTOR

Much as a principal sets the tone and direction of a school, so a director has a major influence on quality of the workplace environment at a child care center. The satisfied workers we interviewed had a good working relationship with the director, and were appreciative of the supportive and professional environment she created or fostered, while those who were unhappy with their work often listed the director and her policies and management style as a cause of their dissatisfaction. Sometimes,

of course, the director merely served as a symbol of the center and the factors that actually produced workers' dissatisfactions were not under her control. However, we were impressed with the scope that directors had for initiating and implementing policies and with the number of work satisfaction variables that were, in fact, a function of the director's style and skill.

We discuss three aspects of managerial skill and style of the director. First, we look at the director's responsibilities and duties and the requisite qualities and skills necessary to carry them out. Second, we examine several policies that directors use to enhance job satisfaction. Third, we look at some issues of center ownership and governance that affect the ways in which directors interact with teachers and aides.

1. Directors' Responsibilities and Skills

As chief operating officers, directors made key choices in translating the abstract philosophy of the center into a working environment with daily routines. They had a strong influence on everything from budgetary allocations and staffing to teaching methods and materials, styles of staff and parent communication and children's' napping procedures. The job description for the director at Communityplace discussed nine areas of responsibility: the education program, fiscal matters and office procedures, parent relations, board relations, personnel, admissions, community relations, maintenance and food service.

At Communitycare and Privateplace, directors had more scope for decisionmaking than they did at Statefare and Childchain. However, even in these latter two centers, directors exercised important choices in terms of staffing and budget allocations and

in terms of which tasks they would take on personally and which they would delegate.

None of the directors had received any formal training in management.[13] They spoke of "falling" into their jobs or moving through the ranks over a period of years. All felt the lack of management training.

For example, these are the comments of the director of Statefare, who had been an aide and then a teacher. She experienced difficulty in the managerial role and worried about the effectiveness of her leadership style:

> I'm very withdrawn about speaking with people. I can be assertive when I want to, but my problem is that I'm not used to telling people what to do, and they have to listen to me. That's my hardest thing about working.

Two other directors said they would like to learn confidence in their leadership abilities. Additionally, they felt they needed classes in business administration and financial management along with the child development classes in order to become better directors.[14]

Both Privateplace and Childchain had experienced a change in directors just a few months before our interviews. In the comparisons between the old and new directors that many of the workers made, we could see the importance of the director's management skills for workers' job satisfaction.

Speaking of the former director at Privateplace, one of the teachers said:

> Her communication skills were really poor. And I don't think she was professional at all...She complained about everything.

At Childchain, too, one of the teachers talked about the difficulty she had experienced with the lack of managerial skill of the former director:

> With Mary (the former director)...you would go to her and talk to her one time, and then you'd go talk to her and her story would change. She contradicted what she said a lot. So you really had to watch and if you wanted something to be done, you had to have somebody else there that heard her say it.

2. Directors' Policies that Enhance Job Satisfaction
a

a. Staff Meetings

One of the most important tasks of a director is to foster a sense of comraderie and support among staff members. This was done most effectively at Communityplace by holding regular weekly staff meetings, with one meeting each month devoted to presentations by outsiders on topics of particular interest to the staff.

The topics for the regular staff meetings at Communityplace were varied. They included discussing individual children who were proving difficult for staff members, brainstorming ideas for funding proposals and exchanging views about what is 'appropriate celebration' of various religious holidays in a culturally diverse community. Our respondents felt both supported and stimulated by these staff meetings.

The presentations by outside experts received high marks from several staff members. For example:

> Last month we had someone from Adult Guidance come and speak about difficult children. They are really very good...(Another time) we had someone come from the Vietnamese community who was also from Adult and Child Guidance and it was very useful, very informative.

The importance of staff meetings as a means of increasing job satisfaction emerged from one of our interviews at Privateplace. There, the former director had not held staff meetings, but the new director had just initiated them. The response to the one meeting that had been held prior to our interviews was favorable, in part because staff members were paid to attend. One teacher commented:

> With the previous director we never had staff meetings because the teachers were never paid. But when ____ (the new director) came we were paid overtime. So we had our first staff meeting...We enjoyed it.

b. Other Policies

When the new director came into Privateplace, in addition to scheduling staff meetings, she immediately made several other changes that enhanced the job satisfaction of the staff: she reviewed several staff members that were due for review and increased the hourly rate of one aide who had just begun to take ECE courses. She also hired an aide to dispense children's medications and give teachers short breaks, worked with a local credit union so that workers at the center became eligible to join and began to investigate the possibilities of medical and dental coverage.

Other policies of directors also had important implications for staff members' job satisfaction. One such policy concerned the ability to leave the center premises during the day. One of the teachers at Privateplace told us that at centers where she had worked previously staff members were not permitted to leave the center premises during the work day. At Privateplace, however, staff members could leave for one hour at lunch. This teacher felt that the policy of allowing time away in the middle

of the day helped greatly to reduce stress and also permitted her to eat with other staff members who shared work ideas, and the joys and frustrations of the job.

A second important director's policy that made a difference for staff members was the availability of adequate materials for children's activities. The director of Childchain, talking about her own experiences as a teacher at a different center said:

> I mean I can't tell you how often I had to, you know, get my own paint, make my own clay, do that kind of thing. And it was coming out of my pocket, and they didn't have petty cash.

Finally, one very important policy for child care staff was the director's willingness to be flexible in allowing teachers and aides to exchange tasks when the stress got unbearable. Highlighting once again the stress involved in the care of young children, a teacher at Childchain said:

> Here there's the ability to call in another teacher and say, 'Hey, I can't handle this situation. Can we trade for a few minutes? Come in here. See what you can do with these students, and then we'll trade back.'

Or the other way around:

> I've said, 'Hey, it looks like you're having a hard time. How about if I take over 15 minutes, and then you come on back in here when you're a little more able to cope.' And by having that ability, and they'll allow us to do that in this school, it really helps.

3. Effects of Center Ownership and Governance

As noted earlier, we chose the four centers in our sample so that they would vary with respect to ownership and governance. These matters very much affected the director's managerial scope and style. And, in turn, the degree of autonomy faced by the director affected the center's staff.

The director at Privateplace had the greatest scope for decisionmaking. Policy at Privateplace was set jointly by the director and the owner of the center. There was no governing board. At the other end of the spectrum was Childchain, where the director's autonomy was severely limited by the hierarchical structure of the national and local chain management.

The directors at Communityplace and Statefare were not as autonomous as the director at Privateplace, but had much more latitude for decisionmaking than the director at Childchain. Communityplace was governed by a board of directors, and staff members were appointed to both the personnel committee and the long-range planning committee of the board. Both the board and the center director also had a good deal of interaction with one of the local social service agencies. At Statefare, the director's latitude was limited by numerous state rules and regulations associated with the center's eligibility for state subsidization.

a. Childchain

We cannot fully discuss here all of the ways in which the various forms of ownership and governance affected the director and, ultimately, the staff. However, using our interviews from Childchain, we briefly make two points: (1) in several cases tight supervision from national management interfered with the job satisfaction of center personnel; and (2) even though the director was ostensibly on a short leash, by disregarding certain directives from above, she could increase the autonomy and job satisfaction of her staff members.

The chain's style of management provided for centralized directives and guidelines in all areas: fiscal, personnel, curriculum etc. To monitor these directives and guidelines, centers received frequent, unannounced, visits from officials of the chain who inspected classrooms and analyzed the center's operating procedures. Moreover, the office of the district supervisor for the chain was at the Childchain site.

Several of the teachers and aides disliked the close supervision by the district and national chain managers.[15] One teacher was perturbed by the interruption to classroom activities that frequent, unannounced visits caused. Nor did she like feeling under constant scrutiny. She thought that often the officials' complaints were unjustified. Most of all she disliked the pressure to conform to a centralized curriculum:

> I know my kids. I know what their abilities are. And I know they're not going to sit there and paint by numbers or whatever it is they're telling me to do...My kids are different from anyone up there in Alabama.

In this teacher's experience, the director determined the extent to which a center followed the recommendations put out by the national headquarters of the child care chain:

> She (the director) is the one that sticks to it, or bends it a little. See, our old director just sort of let us do as we thought was right.

As a result of the former director's willingness to ignore the directives, this teacher ignored them as well. Asked whether the national curriculum directives made her feel that some of her professional autonomy had been taken away she answered:

> Not really...because I really don't listen to them (laughter).

D. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Opportunities for professional development were important to the job satisfaction of a number of our respondents. California law requires teachers at centers to have earned 12 units in early childhood education (ECE) or to be in the process of completing the units. Aides are not required to have any units, but they often take them in order to become teachers.[16]

In general, our respondents indicated that taking ECE courses increased their job satisfaction because it taught them how to do their job, in particular, how to handle difficult situations with groups of children.[17]

An aide at Statefare said that when she was initially hired she thought the job would revolve around things like diaper changing and potty training. But, after the training she took she realized that she could help the toddlers to learn:

> The classes I took helped me. They taught me how to talk to them (the children). I wish I could take more classes.[18]

A teacher at Childchain said:

> I think the turnover is higher in teachers that have not been in the field and have not gotten all their units, simply because they have not gotten the management skills that they really need to deal with the children.

A teacher at Communitycare, who had a BA in art but no ECE courses before she began her job four years earlier, voiced a similar view. She felt that ECE courses had made her more effective:

> People say, 'Oh, what a hard job. How can you do it? How can you work with all those kids.' I say now, 'because I know how to do it.'... Now I know how to handle the kids.

One of the teachers at Childchain got from her courses some fundamental lessons that would gladden the heart of any child psychologist:

> ...if you have a biting child, even though it's wrong, you don't want him to feel bad about himself...Yes, the child has done something very bad. That doesn't mean he's bad. You have to make sure that child knows that he is not bad.

Another teacher at Childchain said that courses were important for learning classroom management techniques:

> If you can't figure out a way to solve an argument going with two children and they just keep fighting, and you can't seem to deal with it, it's extremely stressful...So, if you don't have those skills that you've developed over your many classes it's ...difficult to deal with.

Directors were aware of the difficulty some employees had in attending classes. Because people work all day, they have to take ECE classes at night. This often created a burden for workers, especially those with young children. One way to minimize the inconvenience was to have classes taught on site. The director of Statefare, where classes were once given but which was not currently offering courses, remarked:

> For two years we had a teacher come out and give the classes here, to make it easier for staff members so they won't have to drive out, you know, alone, or they don't have transportation. I think as a group they encouraged each other to come. You got the same amount of units as you did going to college, and it was easier for them. A lot of our teacher aides here now have college units.

The director at Privateplace recalled that at another center where she had worked there had been on-site classes and that they were useful in providing a forum where staff members could "brainstorm any problem they have."

At Childchain, it is corporate policy to pay for inservice workshops. The director there felt that continuing education was important for maintaining staff motivation:

> Oh, yeah, it helps. And going to workshops and things like that. We'll pay for all of it...And if they just go, they get really excited about it. If we finally could get some of the people who have gotten into a slump to get out there and go to some of those things again, it brings you back to life again.

The director of Communityplace believed that one reason her center's turnover rate is relatively low is that teachers regularly attend outside conferences:

> ...we are very flexible and very encouraging of people attending conferences, continuing their education, visiting other centers so that the teacher doesn't feel isolated and they feel part of the bigger effort.

E. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN AND PARENTS

1. Relations with Children

There is a line from a nursery rhyme that appears to summarize child care workers' relations with children: when they are good they are very very good, and when they are bad they are horrid. Indeed, we think that child care workers' relations with children may be the best predictor of job satisfaction and the probability of remaining on the job or in the occupation.

During our analyses of the transcripts of the interviews, we were struck by how often workers mentioned the difficulty they had in dealing with some children in their classrooms. Workers who made the comments usually did so when discussing another aspect of their jobs or when asked to follow up on a statement they had made about children. For example, in responding to a

question about the number of children in her room, one worker at Childchain went on to say:

> The stress I think sometimes is just from the constant battling. You might have a child that's a biter or a hitter. And you've tried stickers. And you've tried redirection. And you've tried everything under the sun to get this child to stop biting. And at this point the child just bit another child. And their arm is red and swollen, and you're trying to think, 'What do I do now?' And you're just to that point where you want to say, 'I quit!'

One of the teacher's husband, who himself used to work as a child care teacher, articulated what was simultaneously stressful and exhilarating and challenging about the occupation:

> I don't think people know in general what it takes to do that kind of job...None of my jobs were as difficult as working in child care. It was a different kind of strain, emotional pressure. You see these kids that you're working with and find out about their home life--and, oh my God, what am I going to do? I mean, what the hell am I going to do to help this child? There is nothing I can do. The parents are divorced, the mother's an alcoholic, and the child comes in with all this pressure on him and you're trying to make him smile.

Some of the teachers and aides appeared to remain in the child care field not so much because they enjoyed being with children but because they felt that their leaving might be harmful to their students. For example, asked to predict how long she would stay at Childchain, one teacher said:

> I don't know. I really haven't thought that far into the future. But I do plan to stay here, because...I know what the kids feel when one teacher leaves...recently we just lost a teacher. And, right now, I mean we're having children wetting that never used to wet. And a lot of whining in the classroom these past few weeks, just because they feel that loss of the extra teacher...So I think about that, and I go, God, I'm never going to leave here unless it's for something really, really, you know, that I just can't handle or deal with it.

But for many of the teachers and aides, the children are a major source of job satisfaction.

...the best thing I like about this job is knowing that the kids care for you. You know that you got a kind of close relationship with them. It makes you feel like you are doing something right.

Asked what she liked best about her job, one of the teachers at Statefare said:

Mainly just the kids. The attachment with the children. And going home and feeling like you did something good. And watching them grow. I think that's a main part.

And a teacher at Communityplace noted that some people would always remain in the child care field because of the rewarding aspects of the job:

...When you start working in child care, it becomes part of you because it is rewarding. Being with children and with families, I don't think a day goes by where you don't laugh, that you don't realize how resilient children are and how resilient families can be. There is like hope and humanity that you see all the time in child care.

2. Relations with parents

Generally, workers had good relationships with parents, although, except at Communityplace, contact was limited. Interaction usually occurred in the brief time that parents were in the center to drop off or pick up their children. However, for some workers, parents were an additional source of stress and frustration. Teachers and aides complained particularly that parents were sometimes not respectful of them and refused to believe negative feedback about their children.

A teacher at Statefare told us:

Sometimes I run up against parents who put you down. Can't tell them anything. Not only when we tell them negative things about their children, other times. They just don't believe it. They put you down.

One of the aides at Statefare also mentioned difficulties in dealing with parents about children who were disruptive:

We have kids, that well I can't say they are terrible or nothing (sic) but they like to bite, they like to scratch and we try to tell the parents, 'Your child is fighting a lot and scratching' and some of the parents say, 'Well at home they don't do it.' We try to explain to them he do (sic) it here. But sometimes the parents, they don't believe us.

At Communitycare, staff have been part of some inservice training to communicate more effectively with parents and several of the workers we talked with thought the training was successful:

One of our inservices we did is respecting the diversity of the parents and not letting your values, to put those on the parents. Because it's really hard ...when a child comes in on a stormy day without a coat to take the parents' point of view and not say, 'That parent is so irresponsible, what were they thinking of?'...

For this particular teacher, relationships with parents are an important source of job satisfaction:

Part of the reason I stay at this center is because I like the parents so much as I do. I have tremendous respect for our parents because they are for the most part low income families. But they are not families that are on welfare. They are the people who are struggling to do the best they can for their children and want their children to do the best they can...I really respect that. They aren't people who have said forget it. They appreciate what you do for them. For the most part, they are pretty nice people.

The director at Communityplace, which in recent years has tried to improve teacher-parent relations, explained that they have come to realize that to wait to talk to parents until there is a problem is to wait too long.

You have to be careful about coming down real heavy handed without trust. If you've never said hello to this parent, or smiled at this parent, or never showed concern to this parent and all of a sudden you're saying that 'your child has a problem'...so...we have meetings at the beginning of the year that are required by the staff to organize to have an informal

meeting with the parents, to get a chance to meet the teachers to talk about goals for the year. They'll look at materials. We get a real good response from parents, a real good turnout.

The director at Privateplace said that working with parents was one of the aspects of her job that she liked most:

> A lot of parents don't have enough education or experience with their children, and it's hard, and there's a degree of helping them, and supporting them, and counseling them, and encouraging them because it can be rough when you're a parent and you don't know all the answers...because a lot of parents just become parents and they aren't ready for it. And the person who pays is the child. And the parents pays, too. So, I just really enjoy it (counseling parents).

IV. CONCLUSION

In the course of our interviews with child care workers, five areas emerged as central to their job satisfaction: pay and benefits, adequacy of staffing, managerial skills and style of the center director, opportunity for professional development, and relations with children and parents. In this conclusion, we summarize for each of these areas several specific policies that our respondents told us enhanced their job satisfaction. Interestingly, several of these policies are not expensive to implement.

Although we did not include it in the sample for that reason, Communitycare in many ways turned out to be a "model" center that had already put into place many of the policies associated with employee job satisfaction. Communitycare had also initiated a request for designation as a high quality center by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.[19] However, Communitycare did not have a monopoly on enhancing job satisfaction; several of the policies we discuss

here also come from the other centers in our sample.

A. PAY AND BENEFITS

In addition to raising salaries across the board, which would no doubt increase job satisfaction, there are several steps that centers could take in the pay and benefits domain. Providing reduced tuition for employees' children and tuition subsidies for employees are important benefits as are paid vacations and paid sick days. The availability of health and dental insurance are also key.

Paying employees during the hours they are at staff meetings and ensuring that they do not have to pay out of their own pockets for their students' educational and play materials are additional ways of conveying to staff members that they are valued professionals.

B. STAFFING

Inadequate staffing is part of a vicious circle in child care centers. Limited funds, high turnover rates, high absenteeism, and the difficulty of hiring substitutes, translate into chronic short-handedness. Chronic short-handedness, produces stress, which then leads to still more turnover and absenteeism. It will not be possible for centers to more easily hire high-quality staff until the level of compensation is increased. But some of the stress that child care workers now face as a result of inadequate staffing could be reduced by hiring permanent substitutes.

C. MANAGERIAL SKILLS AND STYLE OF THE DIRECTOR

The managerial skills and style of the director are critical to child care workers' job satisfaction. Both staff members and directors told us that directors should receive

training in communicating with, supervising, and reviewing personnel.

Holding regular staff meetings provides both support and stimulation for teachers and aides. Regular meetings offer staff an opportunity to feel professional, obtain support from colleagues, receive information, and discuss difficult cases. Scheduling regular meetings is an extremely cost-effective means of increasing employee job satisfaction.

Other policies that may be important to staff are the ability to leave the center premises during the work day and the ability to informally trade duties for short periods of time in order to relieve particularly stressful situations.

D. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Almost all of our respondents reported that they benefited by taking ECE courses because the classes and reading taught them how to be effective in their jobs. Although some may believe that the ability to care for groups of children comes naturally (especially to women), our respondents indicated otherwise. The development of good relationships with children and parents is central to the job satisfaction of child care workers. They told us that by taking these courses they were better able to develop successful relationships.

E. RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS

The director and the board at Communityplace had done a good deal of thinking about how to improve the staff's relationship with parents. Their efforts to form relationships and begin to build trust at the beginning of the year, before there was any trouble to report, seemed to be paying off in better

communication, and greater staff satisfaction. Having inservice workshops on relating to parents also seemed to be useful.

F. SUMMARY

The fundamental point to be made about child care workers' job satisfaction is that it is enhanced when they are treated as professionals. When they are treated as mere baby minders, their satisfaction declines. Having spent some time listening to the joys and frustrations of these workers and observing their workplaces, we conclude that child care workers are not mere baby watchers. Most of them are concerned with the growth and development of their students and see themselves as teachers and teachers' aides.

Job satisfaction is a worthy goal in and of itself. But in the case of child care workers, it also leads to decreased turnover of center personnel,[20] which in turn often improves the quality of care received by children. In other words, the improvement of child care centers as workplaces also improves them for the children who attend.

FOOTNOTES

1. Part of the reason for the wide range of the estimate of the number of child care workers is the lack of clarity about exactly who is considered to be in the occupation. The term child care worker can include directors, teachers and aides who work in nursery schools and child care centers, providers who work in their own homes (family day care providers) and providers who work in the homes of the children they care for (private household workers, nannies, au pairs, etc.).

2. For child care aides of preschool children, the Santa Clara County study found a turnover rate of 68 percent (Mercury News, 1989). To put these percentages in perspective, it is useful to note that in 1983-84 the turnover rate for assembly line workers was 20.1 percent; for waitresses, 32.5 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1986).

3. The median level of education for the workforce as a whole is 12.2 years; child care workers' median education level is 14.6 years (Hartmann, 1988). Yet although the average female worker earns $8.00 per hour and the average male worker earns $12.00 per hour (Hartmann, 1988), the average child care worker earns about $5.35 per hour (Child Care Employee Project, 1989; Hartmann, 1988).

4. In Santa Clara County, California, a high-wage, high-cost-of-living area, the average starting salary for teachers of preschool children was $5.97 per hour in 1988; for aides, the average starting salary was less than $5.00 per hour (Mercury News, 1989).

5. Willer (1987) reports that personnel costs in early childhood programs range from 50 to 80 percent of the total budget. Kagan and Glennon (1982) found that non-profit centers spent about 73 percent of their budget on wages, while for-profit centers spent about 63 percent.

6. Centers funded by the state tend to be in poorer neighborhoods and to have proportionally more minority clientele and staff than other centers. They also tend to have the least financial flexibility because their revenues are determined by state reimbursement rates. Centers funded by social service agencies are more apt to be racially and economically integrated, to serve fewer children than other non-profit centers and to be of higher quality (Rose-Ackerman, 1986). The number of privately owned, for profit centers has increased dramatically in recent years because of changes in tax laws which increased the amount parents could deduct for child care (Kahn and Kamerman, 1987). These for-profits are likely to have middle to and upper-middle class clientele, charge higher rates, and have fewer problem children. Large, proprietary chains have increased in number recently either by expanding internally or by purchasing other chain operations (Kahn and Kamerman, 1987). While no conclusive

evidence exists that these centers provide poorer quality of care, there is concern that budgetary considerations may override other issues.

7. The original design was to interview two aides, two teachers and one director at each center. However, at both Communitycare and Chaincare one of the respondents turned out to have primary classroom responsibility for children, and we therefore list them as teachers.

8. Unlike the other respondents, this teacher, upon hearing of the interviews approached us. Learning of her interest, we asked if she would be willing to be interviewed at her home, and she agreed. We also talked with her husband, who was a former child care teacher.

9. The following 32 topics were included in the matrix: 1. age, 2. previous job experience, 3. professional affiliations, 4. race, 5. marital status, 6. spouse's occupation and salary (if applicable), 7. number and age of their own children, 8. education level, 9. ECE courses--which and when, 10. decision to enter child care field, 11. decision to enter this particular job, 12. job description, 13. salary, 14. benefits, 15. hours of employment, 16. distance from home to work, 17. adult/child ratio, 18. age and number of children served, 19. opportunity for breaks, 20. opportunity for sick leave, 21. sense of budgetary constraints, 22. frequency of staff meetings, 23. staff relations, 24. relations with parents, 25. relations with children, 26. perceived input into decisionmaking, 27. perceived sense that their work is appreciated, 28. perceived match between personal and center philosophy, 29. perceived desirability of child care as an occupation, 30. frequency of thoughts about job termination, 31. perceived ability to find another job or occupation 32. perceived family support for current job and occupation.

10. The benefits at Communityplace included a retirement program financed entirely by employer contributions equal to 8 percent of earnings; the contributions were vested after 5 years. The center also paid the full premium for Kaiser health insurance. Under their benefit plan workers also had a small in-house dental plan that paid $125 per year toward dental check-ups, etc. Workers were also able to obtain life insurance through a center plan.

11. As visitors, we were struck by the havoc we could cause by asking to interview one of the workers--even if the interview was planned well in advance. It was always difficult for centers to find someone who could cover for the worker being interviewed. Frequently, it was the director who left her paperwork and substituted in the classroom because she was the only one available who could be spared.

12. Further complicating the situation, the children did not all begin child care at the same time of year. Unlike public schools, child care centers accept new children throughout the year and move them from one class to another based on available

openings and changes in their developmental levels. Child care staff members were always involved in assimilating new children into their classrooms.

In addition, some centers provided before and after school care for kindergartners and older children. This meant that staff members were welcoming or saying goodbye to children throughout the day and constantly needing to help children deal with leaving parents and adjusting to the class, or removing themselves from play and joining their parents.

13. In California, to get a license to be a director or owner of a private center, one must have 15 units in Early Childhood Education, 3 of which are in administration or supervision AND four years of experience OR one year of college and two years of experience OR two years of college and one year of experience. The regulations for state subsidized centers are somewhat more stringent.

14. One director believed that classes couldn't hurt, but that becoming a good director mostly required time on the job.

15. Not all of the teachers were bothered by close supervision at Child Chain. For example, one of the teachers thought well of the center's policy of having all notes sent home to parents screened first by the director to be sure they were not too negative and were free of spelling errors.

16. Requirements are more stringent for personnel employed in centers receiving state subsidies. But there are also provisions for emergency credentials for personnel working in state subsidized centers.

17. Only one worker, a male who was currently a college student, thought the child development courses were not helpful. One teacher observed that in her experience certain courses were helpful (those that involved "hands-on involvement"), but that other courses (those that involved "copying notes and then copying more notes") were not. All of the other teachers and aides we talked to thought that taking ECE units enhanced their job satisfaction because the courses gave them skills they needed to perform their jobs and increased their sense of competence.

18.She stopped taking classes when her car broke down.

19. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed a national accreditation program. Participation in the program is voluntary and initiated by the center personnel. The accreditation process includes evaluation of the center's quality of child care from the perspective of outside observers, parents and staff members. The staff members also have an opportunity during the process to evaluate the center as a workplace. Before accreditation is granted, the centers must provide evidence that they have achieved, or have a plan in place to achieve, center-developed goals regarding improving the quality of the child care and work environment at the center.

20. A careful, empirical, study of the relationship between child care workers' job satisfaction and the likelihood of their leaving a child care center (either for another job in child care or to move to an entirely different field) is the subject of Gerlach-Downie's doctoral dissertation.

Table 1.
Characteristics of Respondents

	Age	Salary	Race	Marital Status	Length Emplyd at Cntr[a]	Units When Hired	Add. Units Earned
STATEFARE							
Teacher 1	25	b	Black	Mar	10 yrs	0	15
Teacher 2	40	b	Black	Div	6 yrs.	0	15
Aide 1	25	$4.25	Hisp	Sin	7 mo.	0	0
Aide 2	22	$4.15	Hisp	Sin	3 yrs.	0	0
Director 1	35	$1500/m	Hisp	Div	9 yrs.	0	27
COMMUNITYCARE							
Teacher 3	33	$10	Anglo	Mar	6 yrs.	B.A.	0
Teacher 4	33	$8.89	Hisp	Mar	2 yrs.	A.A.	B.A.
Teacher 5	33	$6	Anglo	Mar	7 yrs.	0	12
Aide 3	21	$5.50	Black	Sin	3 yrs.	0	6
Director 2	35	$2560/m	Anglo	Mar	6 yrs.	M.A.	0
PRIVATEPLACE							
Teacher 6	22	$6.10	Anglo	Sin	8 mo.	9	3
Teacher 7	37	$5.50	Asian	Mar	17 mo.	B.A.	0
Aide 4	19	$5.50	Anglo	Mar	11 mo.	0	6
Aide 5	18	$5.75	Anglo	Sin	9 mo.	0	0
Director 3	b	b	Anglo	Sin	6 mo.	A.A.	0
CHILDCHAIN							
Teacher 8	22	$6.25	Hisp	Div	8 mo.	8	6
Teacher 9	30	$6.75	Anglo	Mar	9 mo.	27	0
Teacher 10	21	$6.25	Anglo	Sin	10 mo.	12	0
Aide 6	30	$5	Anglo	Mar	1 mo.	0	0
Director 4	26	$1400/m	Hisp	Mar	9 mo.	27	0

a Total amount of time at this center, but not necessarily at present position. Also, person may have had prior child care experience at other centers.

b would not disclose.

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